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CENTRE TO PERMANENTLY DEPLOY CISF IN ED OFFICES IN SELECT CITIES

The decision was taken in view of a threat assessment report by the Intelligence Bureau after the Sandeshkhali mob attack | P7

INITIAL DEPLOYMENT IN SEVEN CITIES

The force will be deployed at the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) offices in Mumbai, Jalandhar, Kolkata, Jaipur, Ranchi, Raipur and Kochi for now. High-level talks are on to weigh deploying them in more cities, sources in the Union home ministry said. A mob linked to a local Trinamool Congress leader attacked ED officers in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali on January 5

SC'S POSER ON BENGAL GOVT'S PLEA

- The SC on Monday asked the Bengal govt why it has come in as petitioner for "protecting the interest" of some private individuals in the Sandeshkhali case, alluding to the arrest of Shahjahan Sheikh
- It was hearing the state's plea against CBI probe into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali

500+

CASES REGISTERED EVERY YEAR BY THE ED OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

U.P. DIARIES

KASHI: A DATE WITH THE PRESENT

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA
EDITOR

DECODE LS POLLS '24
DECIDE
FIRST OF A FOUR-PART SERIES

VARANASI: In the mind of India, Varanasi or Kashi is an ancient space suspended in an unbroken continuum, not a project under construction. Its life is in the cultural imagination, entwined with centuries-old personal socio-religious histories—cycles of birth and death—embedded far more deep than Ayodhya. The locals breathe this air too. Real antiquity is a historical detour when you keep encountering the refrain: *Paanch hazaar saal purana sheher*. Navigating between those 'five thousand years' and the five-year cycles of modern democracy is, then, the peculiar fortune of Kashi.

It's 2024, and elections to the 18th Lok Sabha are approaching. A different kind of continuity unfolds here too, of course—a prime minister is going for his third win. A sense of assuredness spreads up from the ghats, as it were, which stand like watchful sentinels of a lived experience. Lifted up into the city proper, you are thrown headlong into a bustling desi lifescape in all its contemporary variety. Here, what you find is continuity in conversation with change at many talkative streetcorners.

Antiquity aside, various modern ages seem to coexist here. Baba Vishwanath's temple has an expansive, spanking new, 21st century corridor. Its high walls, with stone cut in rectangular patterns, also strangely remind you of Soviet architecture. The Banaras Hindu University exudes a century old Indo-Gothic charm. The Gyanvapi mosque's 17th century architecture, of course, is often the subject of front-page headlines. Negotiating its place under the scorching sun, caught between Hindutva and high-rises, Varanasi balances itself between an old-world raison d'être and a new-found VIP-ism, like a trapeze artist.

It's an uneasy cohabitation. The new tourism boom has steadily encroached upon the old spiritual ambience, which is slowly fading away. Just like a lot of old India. In a 15-minute walk up from Dashaswamedh ghat alone, about 300 new guesthouses have come up to cater to the new rush of religious tourists—a good number of young among them—from Pune, Rajkot, Meerut, Coimbatore, even Seoul. Evening time, they settle on plastic chairs to witness a Ganga *aarti* through bulb-lit bamboo arches. This new spirituality is not quiet: mantras, bhajans and then the *Maha Tandav Aarti* ring out from modern music systems.

CONTINUED ON: P9

WaPost names former RAW official in Pannun assassination plot in US

Report claims India-based official passed on the New York address of the Khalistani leader

YESHI SELI @New Delhi

THE Washington Post on Monday disclosed the identity of 'CC-1', the New Delhi-based Indian official who allegedly forwarded the details of Khalistani leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, including his New York address, to Nikhil Gupta, an alleged middleman who was enlisted to hire a contract killer. The *Post* named Indian intelligence official Vikram Yadav in the ongoing investigation in the US against the plot to kill Pannun. This is the first time the name is made public.

"Yadav's identity and affiliation, which have not previously been reported, provide the most explicit evidence to date that the assassination plan — ultimately thwarted by US authorities — was directed from within the Indian spy service," the report claimed. The US indictment unsealed in November 2023 had withheld the name of the Indian official who allegedly conspired to kill Pannun, referring to him as CC-1.

EX-RAW BOSS NAMED

The report claims that ex-RAW chief Samant Goel was under "extreme pressure to eliminate... Sikh extremists overseas". It says US agencies also assessed the role of National Security Adviser Ajit Doval but there was no proof

"The assassination is a priority now," the *Post* report quoted Yadav as saying to Nikhil. The US newspaper report also claimed that Yadav's mission was approved by the then RAW chief Samant Goel.

The report says Yadav was a CRPF officer who was deputed to RAW. He was sent back to the CRPF after the case unravelled. When asked for comment, CRPF officials said there is nothing to comment on "an unconfirmed news report", adding that deputation of security personnel in intelligence agencies is classified.

The *Post* claimed the report is part of its investigation series about "a global surge in campaigns of cross-border repression." It added that for the India story, its reporters spoke to various sources in New Delhi, Washington, Ottawa, London, Prague, and Berlin.

The Washington Post report also says that the Joe Biden administration has so far refrained from pressing charges against Yadav.

ACTIVIST POLITICIAN

Srinivasa Prasad passes away at 77

K SHIVA KUMAR @Mysuru

FORMER Union minister and sitting BJP MP V Srinivasa Prasad passed away early on Monday morning at a private hospital in Bengaluru. He was admitted to the hospital a few days ago for age-related ailments.

The 77-year-old leader, who was a minister in the previous Siddaramaiah government, was the face of the downtrodden in the state for several decades. He is survived by his wife Bhagya, three daughters and grandchildren.

In a five decade-long public life, which he chose to retire from on March 17, 2024, he contested 14 elections and won eight. He was a six-term MP from the Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency and served as food and civil supplies minister in the Prime Minister AB Vajpayee government. In his latest term, he had politely refused any ministerial berth or constitutional post offered by the BJP top brass.

He was born to M Venkataiah and DV Puttamma at the Ashokapuram Dalit Colony in Mysuru.

Prasad, who was the youngest parliamentarian in 1980, was close to then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He served as the State Youth Congress chief, KPCC general secretary and treasurer and was instrumental in S Bangarappa and M Veerappa Moily becoming chief ministers.

P5

JDS TO SUSPEND SEX SCANDAL ACCUSED PRAJWAL FROM PARTY

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Shivamogga/Bengaluru

JANATA Dal (Secular) has decided to suspend its Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna from the party. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) is probing allegations of his sexual abuse of several women, explicit videos of which have been making the rounds for the past few days.

Prajwal, a JDS candidate from the Hassan Lok Sabha constituency and his father HD Revanna, a former minister, have been named in the FIR.

Former CM and JDS leader HD Kumaraswamy told media persons in Shivamogga that a decision to suspend Prajwal has already been made and it will be recommended at the party core committee meeting in Hubballi on Tuesday.

The former CM said that since Prajwal is a Member of Parliament, it has to be done from Delhi and he has requested JDS national president HD Deve Gowda to take necessary action. "Neither he (Gowda) nor I was aware of this issue," he said.

He clarified that it was an individual issue and not a family issue. "Their (Revanna's) family is separate and our (his family and PM Deve Gowda's) family is separate. If he (Prajwal) is guilty, he has to be punished," he said.

CONTINUED ON: P4

SIT likely to summon Revanna

Bengaluru: The SIT investigating the sexual assault case gathered information from five women, who were allegedly harassed by JDS MLA HD Revanna and his MP son Prajwal Revanna. It is also likely that the SIT will serve notice to Revanna, asking him to appear for inquiry, soon | P4

Ready to face probe legally: Revanna

JDS leader and former minister HD Revanna said his son Prajwal will join the probe whenever the SIT calls him. "I am aware of the conspiracy and I am not a person to run away in fear. We are ready to face it legally," he said. Revanna said the case is more than four or five years old and he is not going to talk about it.

Daughter-in-law filed false case, says woman

The mother-in-law of one of the victims of alleged sexual harassment has said that her daughter-in-law has filed a false complaint against HD Revanna and Prajwal. She said the woman has filed the complaint only to tarnish the image of the Gowda family during elections.

5 students drown near Mekedatu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

AN excursion turned tragic for a group of 12 students, when five of them, including three girls, drowned at Sangama near Mekedatu in Kanakapura of Ramanagara district on Monday. The police have fished out all the five bodies.

The deceased were identified as Harshitha (20) from Chikkabanavara in Mandya who was studying at a college there, Abhishek (20) from Bihar who was studying computer science at Malleswaram Government College, Tejas (21), a second-year BCA student at a college in Vijayanagar and hailing from Chitradurga, Varsha (20), a student of KLE College in Rajajinagar, and Neha (19), both residents of Bengaluru.

The police said the 12 youngsters — eight boys and four girls — had studied PU together and were currently in different colleges. They had reached Mekedatu on six two-wheelers. Around 12.30 pm, they checked the depth of water and entered the river to play. As it was not deep, seven of them ventured farther and started drowning.

"Two of them, who were at a distance, rushed and pulled two to safety. But five others, including three girls, drowned. The seven came out of water and sought help to find their friends. The police too received information. The rescue staff from the fire and emergency services were called in and with the help of local divers, five bodies were fished out," the police said. None of the students knew how to swim. The bodies were handed over to their family members after the postmortem.

RAHUL MAY CONTEST FROM RAE BARELI

PREETHA NAIR @New Delhi

THE Congress is likely to field Rahul Gandhi from Rae Bareli and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may not contest in this year's Lok Sabha elections, sources in the party said, amid continuing suspense over who would get the Rae Bareli and Amethi nominations.

It was widely speculated that Rahul would contest from Amethi. However, sources said the party may field late Congress leader Sheila Kaul's grandson in that seat. Kaul, a sister-in-law of Jawaharlal Nehru, was a five-time member of Parliament and Union minister.

Sources said who contests from Rae Bareli is important for the Congress as it has been a party bastion since 1951. After serving four consecutive terms as the Rae Bareli MP, Sonia Gandhi vacated the seat to become a Rajya Sabha member. However, Priyanka's unwillingness to fight the elections and the BJP's constant attack on the Gandhis for turning away from the "family bastions" has put the party in a spot.

"As Priyanka is unwilling to contest, the party has no other option than fielding Rahul Gandhi. The seat was held by former PM Indira Gandhi three times and Indira's husband Feroze Gandhi also represented the seat in 1952 and 1957," said a party leader.

An announcement on Rahul's candidature from Rae Bareli is likely on Tuesday, a party leader said.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a word with BJP leader BS Yediyurappa during an election rally in Bagalkot on Monday | EXPRESS | P6

City's min temp hits 25°C, highest for April in 10 yrs

MOHAMMED YACOOB @Bengaluru

IF it is getting miserably hot during the day, the heat wave now is not sparing people at nights either. Bengaluru recorded a minimum temperature of 25 degrees Celsius on Sunday and Monday — the highest minimum temperature in April in the last ten years.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued not just a daytime heat wave alert, but also a 'warm nights' warning and an 'orange alert' till May 3 in several districts.

On Sunday, Bengaluru recorded the maximum temperature of 38.5 degrees Celsius and minimum of 25 degrees Celsius, while on Monday, it was 37.8 degrees Celsius and 25 degrees Celsius, respectively. It is 2.5 degrees Celsius above the normal minimum temperature for this time of the year.

In Kalaburagi, Bagalkot and Raichur, the minimum temperature has risen by over 3 to 4.8 degrees Celsius.

Kalaburagi recorded 30.8 degrees Celsius minimum temperature against the normal of 26 degrees Celsius on Sunday, an increase of 4.8 degrees Celsius. Raichur reported 28.8 degrees Celsius minimum against a normal of 25, while Bagalkot reported the minimum at 28.1 degrees Celsius as against 25 degrees Celsius, an increase of 3.8 degrees Celsius and 3.1 degrees Celsius, respectively.

P2

Voters split down the middle in Baramati's Pawar vs Pawar contest

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @Mumbai

THE contest in Maharashtra's Baramati Lok Sabha constituency is one of the most high-profile fights that is going to be keenly watched. This time, three-time MP Supriya Sule, daughter of veteran politician and NCP founder Sharad Pawar, is facing tough challenge from her cousin Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra, who is contesting for the first time.

SHOWTIME FOR GLADIATORS

Baramati is a traditional NCP stronghold and Sharad Pawar used to end his election campaign with a rally in this city. However, this time the contest is so close that senior Pawar is not taking any chance and is spending every second day in Baramati to ensure victory for his daughter. On the other hand, Ajit Pawar is also leaving no stone unturned to get his spouse elected to the Lok Sabha.

The stakes are also high because this is the first election after the NCP split last year. According to sources, Sharad Pawar is using his experience and connections to win over the voters, while Ajit Pawar is putting his power and influence to use to turn the tide. However, things are complicated on the ground.

"Ajit Pawar now works with his past political rivals. But on the ground, party workers are not ready to bury past animosity. Ajit Pawar may face vote transfer during polling," said an NCP(SP) leader.

As for Ajit Pawar, he doesn't mince words so that the message is clear. "If any one goes against me, development will be stopped. Funds will not be released. If you want development, then choose my side," he said bluntly in one of his speeches while campaigning.

A local journalist said businessmen are under pressure. "Small businessmen, whose livelihood is at stake, and big businessmen, whose business can be easily destroyed by the government machinery, are rallying behind Ajit Pawar," he added.

ILLUSTRATION: MANDAR PARDIKAR

A political observer said voters are split down the middle. "Those who got some tender work with the blessings of Ajit Pawar are standing with him. These are mostly middle-aged men. But the young crowd who are yet to taste power are with Sharad Pawar. So are those above 50 years, who grew with Sharad Pawar's politics and development in Baramati," he said.

The Baramati Lok Sabha segment has six assembly seats, where Ajit Pawar has the support of four BJP, NCP MLAs. Supriya Sule has the support of two Congress MLAs.

In the past three elections, Ajit Pawar was handling all election machinery on the behalf of Sharad Pawar and Supriya Sule. This time, Sule and her father don't have that structural advantage. Sharad Pawar's grand-nephew and young NCP MLA Rohit Pawar donning that role this time.

Sharad Pawar was not much active in past poll campaigns as his nephew Ajit Pawar was doing it on his behalf, though the latter's brazen nature was often a topic of discussion.